NUMB. CCCIX.

The SPECTATOR.

Di, quibus imperium eſt animarum, umbræque ſilentes,
Et Chaos, & Phlegethon, loca nocte ſilentia late;
Sit mihi fas audita loqui: ſit numine veſtro
Pandere res alta terra & caligine merſas. Virg.

Saturday, February 23. 1712.

have before obſerved in general, that the Perſons whom *Milton* introduces into his Poem always diſcover ſuch Sentiments and Behaviour, as are in a peculiar manner conformable to their reſpective Characters. Every Circumſtance in their Speeches and Actions, is with great juſtneſs and delicacy adapted to the Perſons who ſpeak and act. As the Poet very much excels in this Conſideration of his Characters, I ſhall beg leave to conſider ſeveral Paſſages of the Second Book in this Light. The ſuperior Greatneſs and Mock-Majeſty, which he has given to the Prince of the fallen Angels, is admirably preſerved in the beginning of this Book. His ſpeaking and cloſing the Debate; his taking on himſelf that great Enterprize at the Thought of which the whole Infernal Aſſembly trembled; his encountring the hideous Phantom who guarded the Gates of Hell, and appeared to him in all his Terrors are Inſtances of that proud and daring Mind which could not brook Submiſſion even to Omnipotence.

Satan was now at hand, and from his Seat
The Monſter moving onward came as faſt
With horrid ſtrides, Hell trembled as he ſtrode,
The undaunted Fiend what this might be admir'd,
Admir'd, not fear'd ——

The ſame Boldneſs and Intrepidity of Behaviour diſcovers it ſelf in the ſeveral Adventures which he meets with during his Paſſage through the Regions of unform'd Matter, and particularly in his Addreſs to thoſe tremendous Powers who are deſcribed as reigning over it.

The Part of *Moloch* is likewiſe in all its Circumſtances full of that Fire and Fury which diſtinguiſh his Character from the reſt of the fallen Angels. He is repreſented in the firſt Book as beſmear'd with the Blood of human Sacrifices, and delighted with the Tears of Parents, and the Cries of Children. In the ſecond Book he is marked out as the fierceſt Spirit that fought in Heaven; and if we conſider the Figure which he makes in the Sixth Book, where the Battel of the Angels is deſcribed, we find it every way conſiſtable to the ſame furious enraged Character.

—Where the might of Gabriel *fought,*
And with fierce Enſigns pierc'd the deep array
Of Moloc, *furious King, who him defy'd,*
And at his chariot wheels to drag him bound
Threatn'd, nor from the Holy one of Heav'n
Refrain'd his tongue blaſphemous; but anon
Down cloven to the waſte, with ſhatter'd arms
And uncouth pain fled bellowing. — —

It may be worth while to obſerve, that *Milton* has repreſented this violent impetuous Spirit, who is always driven on by ſuch precipitate Paſſions, as the *firſt* that ſpeaks in the Aſſembly, to give his Opinion upon the preſent Poſture of Affairs. Accordingly he declares himſelf abruptly for War, and appears incenſed at his Companions, for loſing ſo much time as to deliberate upon it. All his Sentiments are full of Audacious and Deſperate. Such is that of deſigning themſelves with their Tortures, and turning their Puniſhments upon him who inflicted them.

——No, let us rather chuſe,
Arm'd with Hell flames and fury, all at once
O'er Heavens high tow'rs to force reſiſtleſs way,
Turning our tortures into horrid arms
Againſt the Torturer; when to meet the Noiſe
Of his almighty Engine he ſhall hear
Infernal Thunder, and for Lightning ſee
Black fire and horror ſhot with equal rage
Among his Angels; and his throne it ſelf
Mixt with Tartarean Sulphur, and ſtrange fire,
His own invented Torments ——

His preferring Annihilation to Shame or Miſery, is alſo highly ſuitable to his Character; as the Comfort he draws from their diſturbing the Peace of Heaven, namely, that if it be not Victory it is Revenge, is a Sentiment truly Diabolical, and becoming the Bitterneſs of this implacable Spirit.

Belial is deſcribed, in the Firſt Book, as the Idol of the Lewd and Luxurious. He is in the Second Book, purſuant to that Deſcription, characterized as timorous and ſlothful; and if we look into the Sixth Book, we find him celebrated in the Battel of Angels for nothing but that Scoffing Speech which he makes to *Satan*, on their ſuppoſed Advantage over the Enemy. As his Appearance is uniform, and of a piece, in theſe three ſeveral Views, we find his Sentiments in the Infernal Aſſembly every way conformable to his Character. Such are his Apprehenſions of a ſecond Battel, his Horrors of Annihilation, his preferring to be miſerable rather than *not to be*. I need not obſerve, that the Contraſt of Thought in this Speech, and that which precedes it, gives an agreeable Variety to the Debate.

Mammon's Character is ſo fully drawn in the Firſt Book, that the Poet adds nothing to it in the Second. We were before told, that he was the firſt who taught Mankind to ranſack the Earth for Gold and Silver, and that he was the Architect of *Pandæmonium*, or the Infernal Palace, where the Evil Spirits were to meet in Council. His Speech in this Book is every way ſuitable to ſo depraved a Character. How proper is that Reflection, of their being unable to taſte the Happineſs of Heaven were they actually there, in the Mouth of one, who while he was in Heaven, is ſaid to have had his Mind dazled with the outward Pomps and Glories of the Place, and to have been more intent on the Riches of the Pavement, than on the Beatifick Viſion. I ſhall alſo leave the Reader to judge how agreeable the following Sentiments are to the ſame Character.

——*This deep world*
Of Darkneſs do we dread? How oft amidſt
Thick cloud and dark doth Heav'ns all-ruling Sire
Chuſe to reſide, his Glory unobſcured,
And with the Majeſty of darkneſs round
Covers his Throne; from whence deep thunders roar
Muſtring their rage, and Heav'n reſembles Hell?
As he our darkneſs, cannot we his light
Imitate when we pleaſe? This deſart Soil,
Wants not her hidden Luſtre, Gems and Gold;
Nor want we Skill or Art, from whence to raiſe
Magnificence; and what can Heav'n ſhew more?

Beëlzebub, who is reckon'd the ſecond in Dignity that fell, and is in the Firſt Book, the ſecond that awakens out of the Trance, and confers with *Satan* upon the ſituation of their Affairs, maintains his Rank in the Book now before us. There is a wonderful Majeſty deſcribed in his riſing up to ſpeak. He acts as a kind of Moderator between the two oppoſite Parties, and propoſes a third Undertaking, which the whole Aſſembly gives into. The Motion he makes of detaching one of their Body in ſearch of a new World is grounded upon a Project deviſed by *Satan*, and curſorily propoſed by him in the following Lines of the firſt Book.

Space may produce new Worlds, whereof ſo rife
There went a fame in Heav'n, that he e'er long
Intended to create, and therein plant
A generation, whom his choice regard
Should favour equal to the Sons of Heaven:
Thither, if but to pry, ſhall be perhaps
Our firſt eruption, thither or elſewhere:
For this infernal Pit ſhall never hold
Celeſtial Spirits in bondage, nor th' Abyſs

Long

Lay under Darkneſs ever. But theſe thoughts
Full Counſel muſt mature:——

It is on this Project that *Beelzebub* grounds his Propoſal.

——— What if we find
Some eaſier enterprize? There is a place
(If ancient and prophetic fame in Heav'n
Err not) another World, the happy Seat
Of ſome new Race call'd Man, about this time
To be created like to us, though leſs
In power and excellence, but favoured more
Of him who rules above; ſo was his Will
Pronounc'd among the Gods, and by an oath,
That ſhook Heav'ns whole circumference, confirm'd.

The Reader may obſerve how juſt it was, not to omit in the Firſt Book the Project upon which the whole Poem turns: As alſo that the Prince of the fall'n Angels was the only proper Perſon to give it Birth, and that the next to him in Dignity was the fitteſt to ſecond and ſupport it.

There is beſides, I think, ſomething wonderfully beautiful, and very apt to affect the Reader's Imagination in this ancient Prophecy or Report in Heaven, concerning the Creation of Man. Nothing could ſhew more the Dignity of the Species, than this Tradition which ran of them before their Exiſtence. They are repreſented to have been the Talk of Heaven, before they were created. *Virgil*, in compliment to the *Roman* Common-Wealth, makes the Heroes of it appear in their State of Preexiſtence; But *Milton* does a far greater Honour to Mankind in general, as he gives us a Glimpſe of them even before they are in Being.

The riſing of this great Aſſembly is deſcribed in a very Sublime and Poetical manner.

Their riſing all at once was as the ſound
Of Thunder heard remote.——

The Diverſions of the fallen Angels, with the particular Account of their Place of Habitation, are deſcribed with great Pregnancy of Thought, and Copiouſneſs of Invention. The Diverſionsare every way ſuitable to Beings who had nothing left them but Strength and Knowledge miſapplied. Such are their Contentions at the Race, and in Feats of Arms, with their Entertainment in the following Lines.

Others with vaſt Typhœan rage more fell
Rend up both Rocks and Hills and ride the Air
In Whirlwind; Hell ſcarce holds the wild uproar.

Their Muſick is employed in celebrating their own criminal Exploits, and their Diſcourſe in ſounding the unfathomable Depths of Fate, Free-will and Fore-knowledge.

The ſeveral Circumſtances in the Deſcription of Hell are very finely imagined; as the four Rivers which diſgorge themſelves into the Sea of Fire, the Extreams of Cold and Heat, and the River of Oblivion. The monſtrous Animals produced in that infernal World are repreſented by a ſingle Line, which gives us a more horrid Idea of them, than a much longer Deſcription would have done.

——— Nature breeds,
Perverſe, all monſtrous, all prodigious things,
Abominable, inutterable, and worſe
Than Fables yet have feign'd, or fear conceiv'd,
Gorgons, and Hydra's, and Chimera's dire.

This Epiſode of the fallen Spirits, and their Place of Habitation, comes in very happily to unbend the Mind of the Reader from its Attention to the Debate. An ordinary Poet would indeed have ſpun out ſo many Circumſtances to a great Length, and by that means have weakned, inſtead of illuſtrated, the principal Fable.

The Flight of Satan to the Gates of Hell is finely imaged.

I have already declared my Opinion of the Allegory concerning *Sin* and *Death*, which is however a very finiſhed Piece in its kind, when it is not conſidered as Part of an Epic Poem. The Genealogy of the ſeveral Perſons is contrived with great Delicacy. *Sin*, is the Daughter of *Satan*, and *Death* the Offſpring of *Sin*. The inceſtuous Mixture between *Sin* and *Death* produces thoſe Monſters [illegible] hounds which from time to time enter into their Mother, and tear the Bowels of her who gave them Birth. Theſe are the Terrors of an evil Conſcience, and the proper Fruits of *Sin*, which naturally riſe from the Apprehenſions of *Death*. This laſt beautiful Moral is, I think, clearly intimated in the Speech of *Sin*, where complaining of this her dreadful Iſſue, ſhe adds,

Before mine eyes in oppoſition ſits
Grim Death my Son and foe, who ſets them on.
And me his Parent would full ſoon devour
For want of other prey, but that he knows
His end with mine involv'd ———

I need not mention to the Reader the beautiful Circumſtance in the laſt Part of this Quotation. He will likewiſe obſerve how naturally the three Perſons concerned in this Allegory are tempted by one common Intereſt to enter into a Confederacy together, and how properly *Sin* is made the Portreſs of Hell, and the only Being that can open the Gates to that World of Tortures.

The deſcriptive Part of this Allegory is likewiſe very ſtrong, and full of Sublime Ideas. The Figure of Death, his Menace to Satan, his advancing to the Combat, the Outcry at his Birth, are Circumſtances too noble to be paſt over in Silence, and extreamly ſuitable to this *King of Terrors*. I need not mention the Juſtneſs of Thought which is obſerved in the Generation of theſe ſeveral Symbolical Perſons; that *Sin* was produced upon the firſt Revolt of Satan, that *Death* appeared ſoon after he was caſt into Hell, and that the Terrors of Conſcience were conceived at the Gate of this Place of Torments. The Deſcription of the Gates is very poetical, as the opening of them is full of *Milton*'s Spirit.

——— On a ſudden open fly
With impetuous recoil and jarring ſound
Th' infernal doors, and on their hinges grate
Harſh Thunder, that the loweſt bottom ſhook
Of Erebus. She open'd, but to ſhut
Excell'd her power; the Gates wide open ſtood,
That with extended wings a hanner'd Hoſt
Under ſpread Enſigns marching might paſs through
With Horſe and Chariots rank'd in looſe array;
So wide they ſtood, and like a furnace mouth
Caſt forth redounding ſmoak and ruddy flame.

In *Satan*'s Voyage through the *Chaos* there are ſeveral Imaginary Perſons deſcribed, as reſiding in that immenſe Waſte of Matter. This may perhaps be conſonable to the Taſte of thoſe Criticks who are pleaſed with nothing in a Poet which has not Life and Manners aſcribed to it; but for my own part, I am pleaſed moſt with thoſe Paſſages in this Deſcription which carry in them a greater Meaſure of Probability, and are ſuch as might poſſibly have happened. Of this kind is his firſt mounting in the Smoak that riſes from the infernal Pit, his falling into a Cloud of Nitre and the like combuſtible Materials, that by their Exploſion ſtill hurried him forward in his Voyage; his ſpringing upward like a Pyramid of Fire, with his laborious Paſſage through that Confuſion of Elements, which the Poet calls

The Womb of Nature and perhaps her Grave.

The Glimmering Light which ſhot into the *Chaos* from the utmoſt Verge of the Creation, with the diſtant Diſcovery of the Earth that hung cloſe by the Moon, are wonderfully beautiful and poetical.

ADVERTISEMENTS.

By Her Majeſty's Company of Comedians,

AT the Theatre Royal in Drury-Lane, this preſent Saturday, the 23d Day of February, will be preſented a Comedy call'd, Epſom Wells. By Her Majeſty's Command no Perſons are to be admitted behind the Scenes.

AT the Queen's Theatre in the Hay-Market, this preſent Saturday, the 23d of February, will be perform'd an Opera called Rinaldo. And on Wedneſday next, the 27th of February, will be performed a new Opera called Hamlet. By Subſcription. Tickets and Books will be delivered out on Tueſday and Wedneſday next at Mrs. White's Chocolate-houſe.

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